



February 27, 2019

House Committee On Veterans and Emergency Preparedness  
Chair Representative Evans, Co-Vice Chairs Representative Lewis, Representative Meek  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, Oregon 97301

**RE: SUPPORT FOR HB 2503**

Chair Evans, Co-Vice Chair Lewis and Meek, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of American Whitewater, I write today in support of HB 2503. Founded in 1954, American Whitewater is a national non-profit organization with a mission “to conserve and restore America's whitewater resources and to enhance opportunities to enjoy them safely.” American Whitewater is a membership organization representing a broad diversity of individual whitewater enthusiasts, river conservationists, and more than 100 local paddling club affiliates across America.

American Whitewater works to protect and restore rivers, maintains a national inventory of whitewater rivers, monitors potential threats to whitewater river resources, publishes information on river conservation, works with government agencies to protect the ability of the public to have a voice in the management of rivers, advocates for legislation protecting our rivers and their aquatic resources, and provides technical advice to local groups regarding river conservation and management. Support and advocacy for emergency response, recreation response and SAR efforts is much in line with our organizational missions regarding river management and safe navigation and access to our waterways.

American Whitewater understands and appreciates the great challenges that SAR and emergency response professionals in the state face in terms of fiscal support and limited resources. We understand that HB 2503 will create a pathway to study and identify any statutory changes needed to implement agreed-upon recommendations related to SAR operations.

We hope to see that, in particular, efforts will be made to improve services to unique users like whitewater paddlers, and collaborative and constructive solutions will be pursued to reduce costs, increase efficiencies, and increase dialogue and partnership with our unique, and highly skilled user group. We believe that such efforts could bring about many positive outcomes, including an increased ability and desire for our members (whitewater paddlers) to interface with rescue professional as volunteers and local experts in their unique activity.

As an organization that represents a unique user group, we understand greatly the benefits of appropriate training and resources for rescue professionals to respond appropriately and efficiently with whitewater paddlers in times of need. American Whitewater strongly supports any effort to find ways to improve SAR and recreation response operations so that both our response professionals can do their jobs in a more financially and operationally strong manner, and so that when whitewater paddlers call for emergency response, they get the absolute best outcome possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this important topic.

*Tom O'Keefe*

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