

Dear Representatives

I am writing in support for HB 2555 and HB 2725.

The heavier the wake boat, the more potent the wake, the greater the hazards for other river users.

Wake boat wakes are much more powerful than natural waves normally experienced on the Willamette River. They are the product of specially engineered boat hulls, added ballast, mechanical wake shapers, and engine exhaust blown out through the water.

It all makes for an exhilarating experience for the wake surfer and great entertainment for the passengers in the wake boat. But it has a devastating effect on most human powered boaters, frequently swamping canoes and rowing shells. In 2018/19 several swamped boats have capsized, tossing rowers and paddlers into the river, damaging the boat and lost possessions of occupants. Some paddlers have been trapped under a capsized dragon boat. At least one rowing shell has been broken in half.

Kaspar Murer, Portland

Below are a few excerpts from the many letters submitted by paddlers to the legislature and Marine Board in 2019:

“Rip City Paddlers: On August 19th, two motor boats were circling each other at slow speed, building up bigger and bigger wakes. As the waves came toward us, our coach told us to brace ourselves for impact. She sat in the front of the boat and leaned forward as a wave of water hit the bow, splashed over her shoulders, and flooded the boat with 8-10 inches of water”

“2019: This summer during a practice session on the Willamette our boat was swamped by waves caused by two wake boats and took on too much water to bail. Our boat sank below the surface and turned upside down, leaving our entire team of 22 people in the water. We lost keys, phones, shoes, and other personal items. We had to swim the capsized boat to the shore, which took us nearly 15 minutes and was very difficult. It is worth noting that neither of the boats who's wake caused us to capsize stopped or assisted us in any manner. “

“Tilikum Dragons, 2019: We did have issues at a several practices earlier in the year in July and in those cases there were so many boats pulling wakeboarders that we had to cross the river and go into the Ross Island Channel. If there are three or four of them going at once it's all you can do to keep the boat from tipping over. There's no way you can do any kind of practice drills it's all just crisis control at that point.”

“Sirens Paddling Club: Over the course of the 2019 season our dragon boat was swamped no less than a dozen times”

“Station L rowing shell capsized; Witness testimony, 2018: The two wake boats caused the accident; neither offered help but watched the rowers in the water and took off again as we approached.”

“Wasabi Paddling Club: I don't enjoy 'being afraid' when we paddle. But I cannot deny that the fear of being overturned or swamped is now always at the forefront of our minds when we practice.”