

Please Testimony on SB 840
Paul Donheffner, former Director
State Marine Board

I hate to come out of retirement to testify on SB-840, but this is a terrible bill. I was the OSMB director from 1984 to 2010. During this period we managed the agency with one significant fee increase. In the past 4 years, boating registration fees have doubled and it appears there is no end in sight. The agency has a spending problem, not a revenue problem.

SB-840 would allow local governments to double the fees again if they choose. Why? It is a big mistake to give local governments the ability to tax watercraft. Under a longstanding state statute, the state registration fee that OSMB collects is in lieu of any other tax or license fee, see (ORS 830.790 (3)). You have to keep that intact.

If the Legislature opens this up, there will be no end to local governments trying to claw money out of boat owners for all kinds of real or imagined needs. It is a scary proposition. Please don't go down this hole.

Most derelict vessels on Oregon's waterways are commercial craft, usually fishing vessels that owners walk away from. Most sink and are fairly benign. If they are leaking fuel or contaminates, it becomes a Coast Guard or DEQ issue. After that, they are junk.

Why should recreational boat owners be forced to pay to dispose of commercial vessels or boats that people abandon? OSMB is trying to make this a full time program, so they want more money. But after doubling registration fees in the recent past, is there no check on how much the Legislature is willing to throw at this agency?

In a year where people having been dealing with the pandemic, closed businesses, unemployment, wildfires, no schools, riots and uncontrolled murder in the streets of Portland, this is not the time to raise taxes and fees.

Letting local governments tax small boats is a big mistake. Please stop SB-840.