

Chair Wagner, Vice-Chair Girod, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 857. For the record, my name is Tom Jones, and I am the president of president of Oregon Recreational Boaters United.

When my wife and I purchased a home on the Willamette River in Wilsonville in 2017, we were immediately alarmed by the erosion of the riverbank on the property.

The previous owner hadn't taken steps to prevent invasive species from killing the native dogwood. There's a significant management problem along the river as property owners don't understand the importance of a healthy riverbank and either defer important maintenance or take actions that spur further erosion.

While my background is in commercial contracting and real estate development, restoring my riverbank became a passion of mine. I spent months learning the importance a healthy riverbank plays in the river's ecosystem and have invested ample time and money in making sure my property is having a positive impact on the river.

To address the erosion, I had to go through a complicated permitting process that took nine months. I started by working with a slew of agencies: the Division of State Lands, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Department of Environmental Quality, the National Marine Fisheries Services, the city of Wilsonville and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. Then I hired a surveyor, a geotechnical engineer, a wetland ecologist, civil engineers, and arborists.

The experts all agreed — the lack of native vegetation and mismanagement of native trees caused the majority of the erosion. The city of Wilsonville gave us an emergency tree removal permit and advised us to employ experts to save the rest of the trees and bank. We put more than \$50,000 into the restoration, and now have a much healthier riverbank.

From this process, I learned that the three biggest causes of human-caused erosion are the clearing of natural vegetation, mismanagement of existing trees and plants, and improper draining of property. Naturally, much of the erosion occurs from rapid fluctuations of water levels. When water recedes too fast, the weight of the saturated riverbank soil is unsupported, which is why it is essential to maintain the native vegetation.

On my property, the previous owners had allowed invasive ivy and blackberry to grow and kill the native red twig dogwood, exposing the roots of the trees on the riverbank. As a result, the trees had broken loose and in the following two winters of high waters we lost 15 feet of riverbank.

However, during the boating season we did not lose any riverbank. While we can all understand a river ecosystem is a network of interconnected parts that play a role in overall health, pointing to boating as a significant cause of erosion is unproven at best and simply false at worst.

Nevertheless, there is current legislation attempting to blame recreational boating for the aforementioned riverbank decline. These bills — SB 856 and SB 857 — are presented without scientific merit and are detrimental to families who enjoy safe recreation on the Willamette River.

Instead of rushing through legislation that will likely have no tangible impact on riverbank health, I'm encouraging lawmakers to commission a thorough study to find solutions that work.

Then we can create a more streamlined regulatory process that empowers property owners to learn about their portion of the riverbanks and have the tools to maintain and strengthen them.

We should all be invested in protecting and sharing the Willamette River, one of Oregon's treasures. Its health is up to us.