

June 1, 2021

SB 857

Dear Senators,

I am submitting testimony to oppose SB 857. As a boater, river user and homeowner on the Willamette, I'm concerned with the direction our State is trying to take to restrict access to our public waterway from a specific class of user.

This issue was just debated and found to be without merit or support in the House committee and this seems to be yet another attack on the same issue spearheaded by privileged waterfront homeowners in conjunction with a small, but a well organized, group of extremists wishing to gain use for their own group under the cover of unproven opinions backed up by nothing more than other opinions of like-minded within their communities.

I believe they are very much entitled to their point of view on this issue, however, I call into question the accuracy and validity of their opinion. Too often these days, it is the squeaky wheel getting the grease to quiet them, rather than the actual work being done to study an issue and find out the reality.

Actual real long-term studies should be conducted to determine if there is an issue that this bill would seek to address and then and only then, a plan to keep the river and its users, safe and healthy implemented. I personally find it concerning that the Newberg Pool is already one of the most regulated bodies of water in Oregon, and it begs the question on how special interest groups have been able to create a false narrative that tries to hold towed sports accountable for things like erosion, which has many causes, currently, wake surfing is only allowed in two small zones with no adjacent homes, but somehow although there is no actual evidence that these boats cause any of the erosion being touted as a problem these are still too much river for the entitled few.

This bill will make our waterways less safe and negatively impact Oregon families and small businesses. Setting an arbitrary boat weight limit that affects two out of three boats on the upper being active is simply unjust. The House already extensively debated this bill and did not move forward. I respectfully urge you to do the same. Oregon needs our senators focused on COVID, economic recovery, and getting our kids back in school. Please do not waste time on this unnecessary legislation.

Were this bill to pass my 2019 Tournament water ski boat would not be able to be on the river, devaluing my boat, my home and removing the entire reason my family lives where we do and my business pays tax in this state.

Willamette River enthusiasts have long enjoyed various forms of towed sports, and something my family certainly enjoys along with paddling and swimming. During this time where, as a state, we've struggled with many natural disasters and a nationwide pandemic, it seems ill-fitting to focus policy on taking away equity and enjoyment on our river. At the very least, bills should be grounded in solid research and favor the general public, not select waterfront homeowners and paddlers looking to eliminate motorized boating for their own personal gain.

Thank you for your consideration,
Chris Mitchell