

There are currently no peer-reviewed scientific studies to show that boats exceeding 4000 pounds are the primary cause of bank erosion on the Willamette River. The claims against recreational boats as the cause of erosion are not based on scientific evidence; there have been no studies to substantiate these claims.

As a professional hydrologist, it is clear to me that the primary cause of erosion on the Willamette River is not due to wave action from boats; there is simply not enough energy to cause the scale of erosion claimed by supporters of SB 857. A conscientious observer would acknowledge that the primary cause of erosion in most rivers is due to high flows (flood events) scouring the river channel because of the energy contained within the river's flow. Flood events turn the river brown with suspended sediment scoured from the river channel and carry massive trees in their currents after they were washed from the banks. Recreational boats do not turn the river brown with sediment and do not dislodge massive trees from the bank. There is simply not enough energy in the wave action from a passing boat to cause the erosion claimed by supporters of this bill.

Another critical source of bank erosion is due to mismanagement of shoreline vegetation and the disturbance of natural banks due to human activity. Removing native trees and riparian vegetation immediately destabilizes the soil and makes it susceptible to erosion. Mismanagement of runoff from property adjacent to the river due to development and irrigation is also a key contributor to destabilizing bank soils. These activities change the dynamic equilibrium established by nature and are much more detrimental to the natural riparian system than a passing boat. There are many causes of bank erosion and SB 857 targets one of the least likely to cause any significant erosion.

Study the problem before you attempt to implement a solution. Identify the source of the problem by collecting evidence (not opinions) and drawing a logical conclusion through rigorous and objective research. Make an informed policy decision based on scientific evidence, not hearsay. SB 857 will not solve the problem; bank erosion will persist and can only be mitigated through the use of upstream reservoirs to manage flood events and through comprehensive management of riparian vegetation.

I recognize that bank erosion is a problem but I urge you to make vote NO on SB 857 and commission a scientific study to identify and quantify the causes. Otherwise the problem is destined to continue.