

I am writing to oppose SB 857. This legislation is born out of special interest agendas and is not representative of the community at large.

I am an avid outdoor enthusiast who enjoys recreating on the Willamette River. I swim, float, paddle, and boat on the river regularly during the spring, summer, and fall months. It has been one of the greatest blessings for my family to spend time on the river together. We always respect the Oregon boater laws and other users of the river. I know that stretch of river (Newberg Pool) better than most as I have spent 18 years and thousands of hours enjoying its beauty. Reducing access to the river, particularly the boating access, would have a tremendously negative impact on me personally, and my family.

The photos and "research" that are being shown by those in favor of this bill are simply misleading. The way the bill is written, it absolutely will restrict access. A boat simply having the ability to ballast up will disqualify it from being on the river, regardless of how it is actually used. Home values will plummet, business will shut down, and those with boats that exceed this limit (virtually every new boat manufactured these days) will lose value. The rules currently in place are more than adequate. The problem is enforcement! We obey the rules. Unfortunately some do not. It is shocking to see the bill state that there is no financial impact if it passes. That is simply not true.

Last week I spent 4 hours paddling up and down the Tualatin River. The shoreline of the Tualatin looks nearly identical to the shoreline of the Willamette. Yet the Tualatin has less current, no motorized boats, and certainly no skiing, wakeboarding, wakesurfing, or tubing. If you took photos of the Tualatin river shoreline and photos of the upper Willamette shoreline (up close), I would bet you could not tell the difference.

Representatives, have you spent much time on the river? If not, I encourage you to do so. It is beautiful and has remained as such in the nearly 20 years I have recreated on its waters. An all out ban (which is absolutely what it is...my boat would become useless here) is not the answer. My boat is designed to make very small wakes when I want it to, and to make large wakes when I want it to. But this legislation makes it so I wouldn't be able to use it on the river at all.

I have listened to all of the arguments, studies, and have had many many years of personal experience, and this is the most politicized and one-sided case my ears have ever heard. There are so many false, misleading, and inaccurate arguments that have been made. Even the hearings (beginning in the House with Rep. Witt) were uncomfortably one sided and felt staged. Believe me, I want the river to remain protected and in a good state. But you have some bad info and people's lives will be negatively impacted by your vote in favor of this. Oregon is treading down a path that I fear it won't be able to return from, and it saddens me.

Our waterway policies 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. Real studies should be conducted to determine the best ways to keep the river safe and healthy. Furthermore, the Newberg Pool is already one of the most regulated bodies of water in Oregon, and wake surfing is only allowed in two small zones with no adjacent homes. I strongly support increased regulation and policing of the existing rules that are already in place. I see many offenders on the water and it is clear that more education and enforcement are needed.

This bill will make our waterways less safe and negatively impact Oregon families and small businesses. The House already extensively debated this bill and did not move forward. I respectfully urge you to do the same.

Respectfully,  
Scott Williams