



403 SE Caruthers St. #101
Portland, OR 97214
503.223.6418

Chair Beyer and members of the Senate Energy and Environment Committee:

For the record, my name is Travis Williams. I am Executive Director of the non-profit organization Willamette Riverkeeper.

Since 1996, we have proudly served as the eyes, ears and voice of the 187 mile long Willamette River. Our conservation and cleanup programs, together with the support of thousands of Oregonians, enable us to effectively generate positive change for the entire Willamette River Basin.

We believe in a river with excellent water quality, abundant habitat which is safe for fishing and recreation. We believe this is a basic public right. An unfortunate effect of nearly 2 million Oregonians residing in the Willamette River Basin¹ is that all aspects of our “modern lifestyle” literally run off into the river. In particular, plastic debris pollution.

Throughout the year, we host cleanup events on the Willamette River, where consistently 60% of the debris is plastic. For example, in 2020 alone, we removed 216 cubic yards of trash from just the southern part of the river (Eugene and Corvallis only). For a visual, that’s 648 pickup truck beds worth, with 389 pickup trucks worth of JUST plastic. This is JUST the southern part of the Willamette River, in one year. For years, we have seen, first hand, a dramatic increase in plastic pollution.

Today, I am here to support a long-overdue modernization of Oregon’s 35 year old plastics recycling system. SB 582 and the -1 Amendments will revitalize and incentivize Oregon’s recycling system, and clear a path for further growth of the burgeoning / blossoming / expanding and exciting packaging materials and recycling systems’ end markets.

This legislation proposes a structured, multi-faceted approach to modernize our recycling system to confront the problem of plastic pollution, and to help our local and state economies adapt to changing markets. It does many good things

¹ Willamette Riverkeeper estimates based on 2010 Census Data.

organizationally and correctly identifies many of the reforms necessary to address the challenges we face.

But it is merely the floor, not the ceiling. In order to properly “modernize” Oregon’s plastic recycling system, the good work of the Recycling Task Force and the DEQ unfortunately stops short in several key areas:

Producer responsibility is essential to reducing the stream of plastics into our environment. Just like our other state and federal pollution laws, it is *producers* who should be responsible for the life cycle use of the products, paying the true costs of disposal, and collection and reuse of products and their packaging.

As written, this bill puts too much of the burden on consumers for the collection and recycling of these products, and focuses more on *educating consumers* than *producers taking responsibility*. Consumers as individuals do not have the economy of scale to make recycling effective, or the power to drive market transition.

Only through internalizing the external costs of these products and their packaging, can we organize and pay for a recycling system which will truly work in the long run. As this transition process is phased in, so should the cost responsibility of the producers be increased to adequately fund the systems we need to organize a truly effective recycling system in Oregon.

As the proposed bill only targets a goal of “at least” 25% of plastics be recycled by 2028,² this tells you how far behind we are in having a comprehensive and functioning plastics recycling system. Producers are able to drive change through a more sustainable packaging economy; thus producers should be incentivized to move to materials which are more easily recycled.

Secondly, the problems of plastics, especially single use plastic packaging, needs to be addressed in a more aggressive way. To continue to make single use plastic packaging makes the current problems of plastic recycling more difficult. The more we use single use plastic, in all forms, the more of this hard to recycle material we have to deal with.

We must drastically reduce the use of plastics. As a general principle, wherever single use plastics are used, substitutes of non-plastic materials need to be found. This is

² See SB 582-1 Section 27 (2)(a) (page 53 of the bill text).

where the creativity and innovation of the packaging industry must be called upon to find these better, more easily recycled materials.

Oregonians are already starting to use alternative packaging but to a very limited degree. Green packaging markets are predicted to explode to somewhere between \$200B and \$400B in the next 5-10 years, with a compound annual growth rate of between 5.6% and 6.0% a year.³ If we modernize our recycling system now, we can position Oregon to transition to a more sustainable waste management system right when we need it.

By applying the creative forces of the marketplace through business incentives to identify and use these new materials and disincentives to the use of non-recyclable plastics, we can change how Oregonians recycle in a positive way, which will create a cleaner environment well into our shared future.

Oregonians care about the long term environmental costs of plastics on the environment. Not only is plastic trash unsightly, but plastics are made with endocrine-disrupting chemicals, which are very slow to break down in the environment, prolonging the exposure to our fellow Oregonians who draw Willamette River waters for drinking water. To our knowledge, no community is currently testing their drinking water for these chemicals. Fish & birds ingest pieces of plastic. Threatened Chinook, Coho, and Steelhead, to our resident Heron, Egrets, Osprey, Eagles, and Owls, and our avian visitors using the Pacific Flyway for migration are at risk because of the quantity of plastics in the Willamette River.

I thank the Committee and Chair Beyer for bringing forward this bill, and making the reform of Oregon's recycling system a priority for the 2021 Oregon Legislative Session.

Be sure to take a close look at the attached pictures. This is a small sample of the single use plastics that we pull from the Willamette River each year. A closed-loop program will lessen the work we, public volunteers, need to do every month to clean up excess plastic debris, and will protect our health and our wildlife.

³ Numerous different reports. Some even predict 7% CAGR. See as reported by PR Newswire (Jun. 2020), McKinsey (<https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/paper-forest-products-and-packaging/our-insights/the-drive-toward-sustainability-in-packaging-beyond-the-quick-wins>), Acumen Research & Consulting (<https://www.acumenresearchandconsulting.com/sustainable-packaging-market#:~:text=Increasing%20public%20awareness%20of%20environmental,lighter%20packaging%2C%20thus%20reducing%20waste.>), Grand View Research (<https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/green-packaging-market>).

Other governments, both at home in the U.S. and abroad, are already passing laws to address these issues, and we are excited for the prospect for Oregonians, who unquestioningly love their rivers, to be a leader in this arena.

If any of you question the necessity of a bill like SB 582, we cordially invite you and your staff to join us for a Covid-safe “Trashy Tuesday” or “Trashy Thursday”.

Thank you for hearing our testimony on SB 582.

Travis Williams
Riverkeeper and Executive Director
Cell: 503-890-1683
travis@willametteriverkeeper.org

Attached: Pictures of plastic service ware and other waste removed from the Willamette River.



Discarded plastic bottles and styrofoam comprise much of the single use consumer products which find their way into the Willamette River



Debris collected from the Willamette River: More single use consumer products, dominated by plastics