

Submitter: Maria Hall

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Environment and Natural Resources

Measure: SB1589

Testimony before House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources- In favor of SB 1589

February 21, 2022

Note: I was not given the opportunity to speak either Monday or Wednesday during the House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources. I am therefore submitting what I was going to say in writing.

Thank you committee members for providing this opportunity for public input on this bill. My name is Maria Hall. I co-own a farm near Newberg which has the Willamette River as a boundary. We've boated in the area on and off over the past 50 years.

Wake surfing has become very popular and is not doubt fun for those who partake in the sport. The Willamette River has become a common place for surfing and other towed water sports. Unfortunately, unlike large bodies of water found elsewhere, where there can be miles of open water to spread out boaters and allow distance for wake dissipation, the Newberg Pool section of the Willamette is narrow, averaging under 600 feet in width. I have witnessed the big wakes generated by wake surfing boats hitting our shoreline, undercutting the bank, leaving vegetation roots exposed, and causing valuable soil to run into the water. So even if a surf boat stays mid-river, which is rare, its wakes don't have space to dissipate. I have reviewed several studies on wakes, including the recent one by the University of Minnesota, and the evidence is clear that wake surfing wakes require over 500 feet of water distance to have their energy reduced to the same level as a wake from a waterski boat.

I also want to comment about testimony offered by Mr. Gorman (hired by bill opponents) stating that erosion was man made and doesn't exist in the agricultural areas. Hello, we're in an agricultural area, where there is extensive undercutting of the banks at summer levels when the surf boats are out, and the erosion is extensive. I have submitting many photos proving this is true. I have also submitted photos and videos of the big wakes crashing into the undercut areas- That repeated wake impact causes the undercut.

A few words about safety. Aside from hearing numerous stories of people getting knocked off canoes, SUP's and docks or getting swamped by surf wakes, I personally have experienced several incidents resulting from the impact of these wakes, including almost getting knocked overboard and having boat guests soaked by wakes coming over the bow.

The worst incident occurred last June when I was boating with my husband and son.

We encountered wakes from a surfer going the opposite direction. We came to a full stop to try to minimize the impact. I had the wheel to hold on to and I stood up on my feet. My husband was thrown up in the air and landed on his hip and back. His pain was so severe he went to the emergency room. He had a cracked vertebrae. So while the wake surfers had a fun summer with their families, my husband got to spend most of his summer in pain and unable to boat or do much else for that matter. I believe wake surfing, in the context of a narrow body of water like the Willamette River, is not compatible with other forms of recreation and can be outright dangerous. I heard someone compare the situation to dune buggies at the beach. Letting dune buggies zoom all over the Oregon coast where the public is recreating doesn't work. There are select places where they are allowed so as to reduce conflict, increase safety and avoid environmental degradation. This is very analogous to wake surfing. It is a specialized activity where high energy wakes are intentionally generated. There are places in the state that can handle this activity. The Newberg Pool is not one of them.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.