



Thomas O'Keefe, PhD
Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director
okeefe@americanwhitewater.org
3537 NE 87th St
Seattle, WA 98115
425.417.9012

February 9, 2025

Co-Chair Helm

Co-Chair Owens

Vice Chair McDonald

House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

900 Court Street NE

Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: Opposition to HB 2982

Dear Co-Chair Helm, and Owens, Vice Chair McDonald and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the over 3,000 Oregon members and supporters of American Whitewater, I am writing in opposition to HB 2982.

Since 2017 when HB2320 was introduced, American Whitewater and its members have been strongly opposed to the implementation of a non-motorized boating fee system. However, in 2019 we were able to work collaboratively with the Oregon State Marine Board to provide an exclusion for non-motorized boats under 10 feet in length, the justification being that these types of non-motorized watercraft (for example whitewater kayaks and small packrafts) often do not often utilize or need the type of developed access that larger craft sometimes need. With this exception, we were moved to no longer oppose SB47. With the passage of SB47, the Waterway Access Fund was established, requiring non-motorized boats over 10 feet in length—including most inflatable kayaks, rafts, pontoon boats, catarafts, stand-up paddleboards, sit-on-top kayaks, and canoes—to pay new registration fees. We have been happy to see that this year, The Marine Board has used some of these fees to fund improved waterway access on rivers, and we are pleased that a couple of projects stand to benefit whitewater paddlers—particularly those who paddle boats larger than 10 feet in length, as well as whitewater outfitters who also pay their own set of fees to the state.

As outdoor recreationists, we already pay a variety of fees to access and enjoy our public lands and waters—including the National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Access Pass, Oregon State Parks Parking Permits, county park fees, Wild and Scenic River lottery applications and float permit fees, and other location- or activity-specific charges. The growing burden of these fees on recreation users has become a convenient yet unsustainable solution for funding

recreation and conservation programs. Recognizing the need for a more coordinated and simplified permit and fee system, American Whitewater advocated for the establishment of a program to develop agreements among federal, state, and local agencies. This effort was authorized with the recent passage of the EXPLORE Act (Public Law No: 118-234, Section 321). We urge the committee to collaborate with recreation user groups and other stakeholders to explore more innovative, equitable funding solutions—ones that do not rely on increasing the number, cost, and complexity of permits for river recreation.

Further, American Whitewater believes the legislation unfairly targets whitewater kayakers who often use undeveloped or relatively unimproved access sites. Motorized boats with ballast tanks, live wells, and bilge water (e.g., wakeboard boats, fishing boats) remain the most significant vector for aquatic invasive species.

We support the work of this Committee and thank each of you for your commitment to the preservation of Oregon's natural resources. We understand and strongly agree that funding outdoor recreation access and mitigation and prevention of the spread of aquatic invasive species is important. However, we do not believe that the burden of addressing these issues should be placed disproportionately on recreation users, and particularly those paddling small hand-carry watercraft. We look forward to the opportunity to work with the Committee to find an appropriate solution.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. O'Keefe', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Thomas O'Keefe, PhD
Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director