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February 10, 2025

House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Subject: Testimony in Support of HB 2982 – Increasing Boat Fees to Support the Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Fund

Dear Chair Helm, Chair Owens, Vice-Chair McDonald, and Members of the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water:

On behalf of Willamette Riverkeeper, we are writing to express our strong support for HB 2982, a critical step toward reducing the aquatic invasive species in our waterways. Our mission is to protect and restore the Willamette River and its tributaries, and we know firsthand how aquatic invasive species can harm many things, including water quality, native aquatic species, and safe on-water recreation.

Willamette Riverkeeper collaborates with state agencies, counties, water districts, and other entities to remove aquatic invasive species and restore native plants, often through volunteer-driven Paddle and Pull events. We survey and treat over 130 miles of the mainstem Willamette and actively manage seven adjacent sloughs to control Ludwigia. However, state funding for B-listed aquatic weeds has steadily declined, as priority is given to A-listed species. Meanwhile, species like Ludwigia—a B-listed invasive—continue to spread, causing the same harmful impacts as A-listed species.

Aquatic weeds such as Ludwigia, yellow floating heart, and garden loosestrife are more than just a nuisance; they can have devastating effects on fish and wildlife, recreation, water quality, and even the river's hydrology. While many of these invasive species initially entered the Willamette through the aquarium trade, they continue to spread by attaching to boats and drifting downstream to new locations.

Aquatic invasive species cause significant harm, especially if not controlled before they spread further. When left unchecked, they rapidly degrade waterways, limiting public access to Oregon's rivers and reducing recreational opportunities. This not only impacts on-water recreation but

also poses a serious threat to economic revenue for both the state and river-adjacent communities.

These invasive species can overtake entire areas, clogging narrow backchannels and restricting navigability. This impedes access to parts of the Willamette once prized for slow-moving paddling and premier wildlife viewing. Additionally, the excessive vegetative growth reduces dissolved oxygen levels, raises water temperatures and cause several other impacts, endangering aquatic species—including federally listed fish such as Upper Willamette River steelhead and Chinook salmon.

HB 2982 is a well thought out measure to bring much needed money into aquatic invasive species removal. With small increases to boat fees, the state will have a vital fund to both remove and prevent aquatic invasive species from taking over our waters.

The State of Oregon, along with local governments, has already invested in removing aquatic invasive species from our rivers. However, to ensure these efforts are effective, sufficient funding is essential for both removal and prevention wherever needed. Currently, there is a significant funding shortfall, with the state receiving three times more grant applications for aquatic invasive species prevention and removal than available funding can support in recent years.

By passing HB 2982, Oregon can take another step in protecting our waterways from further aquatic invasive species contamination and protect our native and restored habitats.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration.

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