

March 4, 2025

Thank you Co-Chairs Helm and Owens, Vice Chair McDonald, and members of the Committee:

I am asking you to support House Bill 3314 with the “- 1” amendment, to fund design and permitting for a solution to mitigate the harmful cyanobacteria bloom in Ross Island Lagoon.

I am a resident of Southeast Portland and Willamette River user for over 30 years. I am president of Oaks Park Community boathouse, an umbrella organization including 4 rowing and paddling clubs totaling about 250 users across youth, collegiate, and masters athletes. *While I also sit on the Oregon State Marine Board, I want to remind you that this testimony is my own opinion, and does not reflect an Agency or Board position.*

After working for decades to “clean up the river,” we now face a naturally occurring health and safety threat. Cyanobacteria blooms cause human illness, damage our fish and wildlife populations, and can have economic impact on small businesses that rent or sell watercraft. There are also extended impacts, that can affect the region. As an example, an early September Dragon Boat Festival at Tom McCall Bowl has been threatened with cancellation due to blooms that travel downstream toward the Bowl. This event attracts several thousand participants and their families from all over the US and Canada. Cancellation would not only affect the sponsoring organizations, but hotels, restaurants, and other tourism activities.

In 2019, the Oregon Legislature adopted SB 47, creating the Waterway Access Program. This program, funded by nonmotorized boaters, provides funding for capital projects supporting nonmotorized boating, as well as grants for boating safety education and access opportunities. Some of these educational grant recipients use the Willamette, including the Ross Island area, for their activities. Continuation of the trend in cyanobacteria blooms, including the increasing length of bloom and increasing size of the impacted area, will threaten the ability of these groups to fulfill their missions. Indeed, in 2022 and ‘23, several events funded by Waterway Access Grants had to be cancelled, postponed or move to other waterways. Clients of these programs include folks who might not otherwise get on the water. Low-income youth learning about water safety and environmental issues; Indigenous families learning how their predecessors viewed and used environmental resources, and getting to experience that safely. Folks with various challenges, physical and/or developmental, getting to experience being on the water, and developing a lifelong interest in paddlesports, in a safe and healthy way.

As a rowing and paddlesports athlete, and former coach in both disciplines, I am also aware of concerns that parents have regarding their kids participating in river-sport activities when the algae bloom risks are high. At Oaks Park Community Boathouse, it is easy for our squads to go upstream, however there are over 1,000 rowers and paddlers affiliated with clubs near River Place and the east side of the Ross Island Bridge, don’t have that choice, and limit or cancel practice during severe blooms.

The blooms, including their severity and duration, can be mitigated with a solution under development by a team at Oregon State University. A solution that is based in sound engineering and climate resiliency. Please help save our river, fish, wildlife, and recreational opportunities by supporting HB 3314 – 1.

Thank you.

Laura Jackson