

Submitter: Sam Wardwell
On Behalf Of: Willamette Riverkeeper
Committee: Senate Committee On Energy and Environment
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB301

My name is Sam, and I am a resident of Portland. I am an active user of the Willamette River. I am writing today to express my strong opposition to SB 301 and its proposed amendment to remove ballast weight from vessel weight regulations in the Newberg Pool.

I am deeply concerned that this bill and its amendment would undermine the progress made under SB 1589 (2022), which has significantly improved both public safety and ecological health in this unique section of the Willamette River.

The Newberg Pool has become a vital space for paddlers, swimmers, anglers, and other low-impact users who rely on its calm waters. The inclusion of ballast weight in boat restrictions under SB 1589 was essential to reducing unsafe wakes and conflicts between river users. Removing this ballast weight consideration will reintroduce the same enforcement challenges that plagued the area for over a decade.

Additionally, this change would have dire ecological consequences. The Newberg Pool is critical habitat for federally protected Upper Willamette River Chinook salmon and steelhead. Larger wakes from heavily ballasted boats accelerate shoreline erosion, degrade spawning habitat, and threaten already at-risk fish populations. I also question the rationale for this amendment, which seems to benefit only a small number of large wake boat operators at the expense of the wider community and the health of the river. Studies—including a newly peer-reviewed report by Professor Macfarlane—show that larger wake-generating boats require significantly more buffer space from shorelines (500 feet or more), a condition the Newberg Pool simply cannot meet.

SB 1589 is working. It has restored balance to the Newberg Pool, created safer conditions, and reduced habitat degradation. SB 301 and its amendment represent a step backward that I urge you to reject.

Please stand up for river safety, environmental stewardship, and the interests of the majority who cherish this unique waterway. I respectfully request that you vote NO on SB 301 and its proposed amendment.