

Submitter: Brian Ewry

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Energy and Environment

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB301

Dear Senate Committee on Energy and Environment,

Hello, I am a resident of Clackamas and my name is Brian Ewry, and I'm an active boat owner and would like to use the upper Willamette River. I am writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill 301. The towed water sports community has a very simple and reasonable request with this legislation—to be treated equally to all other boat users in the deep waters of the Newberg Pool.

For more than 20 years, I have spent my summers on this river, raising my family and making lifelong memories. However, due to unfair regulations, I no longer have access to this part of the river that has been a fundamental part of my life. This is not right. I strongly believe that accessibility to this waterway should be preserved for all, not just a select group.

Many boaters with ballast capability are unfairly excluded from participating in activities like tubing, water skiing, and wakeboarding because their unused ballast weight is counted toward the overall weight limit. Today, a fishing or pontoon boat with a dry weight of 5,500 pounds is eligible to tow a tuber in the Newberg Pool, but an everyday recreational boat with a much lower dry weight cannot because it has ballast capability, which is prohibited.

This small adjustment makes it easier for the Oregon State Marine Board to manage the towed water sports program and for customers to understand which boats qualify. There is no national standard for registering ballast capacity, making compliance a moving target. The legislation's "maximum ballast capacity" is also overtly punitive. Families have purchased boats with smaller ballast capacity to ensure they are under the 5,500-pound combined weight limit, only to be denied a permit because their boat line has a model with a larger ballast, which they did not purchase.

I do not believe legislators intended to exclude more than 90% of new recreational boat models from the river, crushing local small businesses and making it almost impossible for everyday people to buy qualifying boats. We want to have the opportunity to share the river, have fun with our families, and safely enjoy the sports we love for a few months out of the year.

Meanwhile, there are plenty of other locations that have been made available for paddle sports enthusiasts, such as Oswego. It is unfair to continue restricting access to long-time boaters while other groups are accommodated.

I also want to make it clear that I am paying attention to who is voting on this issue. The last person who brought a similar bill to committee lost his job because voters made sure he was not re-elected. You cannot move onto the river and then change the rules just because you don't like the way it has always been used.

With this legislation, the Newberg Pool will remain one of Oregon's most highly regulated water bodies. To tow riders in this river stretch, boaters must meet the weight requirement, complete an online safety education course, apply for a towed watersports decal, and pay additional fees.

I urge you to support Senate Bill 301 and restore fair access to the river for all users.