



March 24, 2025

Dear Senate Committee Members:

I am writing to oppose the removal of ballast weight and thus weight restrictions in the Newberg Pool under SB 301. Frankly, I am very disheartened that this has been continually brought up since SB 1589 passed. SB 1589 was passed due to public safety and environmental concerns as a result of allowing wake surfing in the Newberg Pool for a brief period of time. One of the Portland television stations even recorded a video of a scull breaking in half as a result of wake surfing. There was another instance of dragon boats getting swamped from wake surfing boats. We clearly saw the negative impacts, and to revisit this is really disappointing.

I am a licensed Civil Engineer, with a PhD in Water Resources. The Willamette River has highly erosive bed and bank material, and heavy boat traffic (particularly larger boats) can create significant erosion. I have studied the erosion and depositional patterns along the Willamette River for many years, and have observed the extreme erosion caused in some river reaches that experience heavy boat traffic. The magnitude of the waves caused by large boats cause erosion that would never occur naturally, particularly when wake surfing. Natural erosion occurs during the winter months with high flows, not during the summer when erosion from boats commonly occurs. Erosion from these large boats can cause damage to docks, river banks can fail, and fisheries can be impacted. Although I have heard comments from the Oregon State Marine Board and boating groups that there is “no proof erosion is caused by large boats,” there are several published studies and reports by public agencies on many types of rivers quantifying the impact. There should be no question that these large boats are causing significant erosion, as well as damage to the river banks and aquatic ecosystem.


I have also seen the “study” submitted by Ecological Engineering and prepared for the Oregon Recreational Boaters United. It appears they just looked at banks from a boat and assessed the reason for erosion. First of all, this is disingenuous; the reason for bank failure can be surmised by looking at it, but a more thorough investigation with actual measurement devices would be necessary to confirm. The slide deck selectively shows a bank in Champoeg Park, and not the bank/dock in Champoeg Park where the state spent significant monies to restore. In addition, this study merely shows that the Willamette River has highly erosive bed and bank material that will likely fail if we continue to allow practices (such as wake surfing) that erode sediment. It is clear that there are multiple causes of erosion. Just because there are other reasons for bank failure does not mean we should allow this one, particularly since it causes safety issues, puts endangered species at risk, etc.

In the past few years, larger boats used for wake surfing have been allowed in Newberg Pool, and the impacts are visible. These boats were designed for large water bodies such as ocean bays, large lakes, etc. They are not intended for narrow rivers. Significant erosion along homeowners’ banks has occurred, and non-motorized boaters have been swamped (or worse) when these large boats pass. There are several documented incidences of wake surfing boats ignoring distancing regulations and generally causing havoc on the river. It is disheartening that the desires of a few boaters and the wake surfing industry have taken precedence over the many other users of the river. The river is much too narrow to safely allow these

large boats to coexist with swimmers, fishing boats, paddlers, homeowners with docks, etc. as we have observed.

All sources of erosion need to be considered when making decisions to protect the shoreline. If one source (large boats) is not considered, then the problem will not be solved. Adult and juvenile salmon, sturgeon, osprey, blue herons, bald eagles, and other wildlife depend on the Willamette River Greenway ecosystem. The Willamette River Greenway is a priceless resource for the citizens of Oregon, and should be protected for future generations (not squandered so one specialized industry can make big profits). If we truly want to protect the Willamette River Greenway, we need to take action now to limit the damage caused by large boats.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cara J. Poor". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Cara J. Poor, Ph.D., P.E.  
Associate Professor and Chair of Civil Engineering  
Shiley School of Engineering